

CHAPTER 23

Al-Mu'minûn: The Believers

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 6 *sections*; 118 *verses*)

This chapter, which brings the third group of Makkan chapters to a close, is known under the name of *The Believers*, because it deals with the success of the believers. It is rightly regarded as one of the latest Makkan revelations, and this is amply attested by internal evidence.

As the final word of kind advice and as a firm expression of the success of the believers, the chapter no doubt forms an appropriate sequel to a group of chapters dealing with the great and triumphant future of Islâm. It seems to continue, in fact, the subject-matter of the last chapter, and therefore asserts the success of the believers in clear and forcible words in the first section, which is followed by two others referring to similar success in the case of former prophets. The fourth section tells us that the history of the Prophet is, in fact, a repetition of the history of previous prophets. The last great Divine revelation was a final blow at polytheism, which really stands condemned out of the mouths of its own votaries, as the fifth section shows. The sixth brings the subject to a close by showing how the wicked will finally regret their evil deeds.

SECTION 1: **Success of the Faithful**

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

- 1 Successful indeed are the believers,^a
- 2 Who are humble in their prayers,
- 3 And who shun what is vain,
- 4 And who act for the sake of purity,^a
- 5 And who restrain their sexual passions^a—
- 6 Except in the presence of their mates or those whom their right hands possess, for such surely are not blameable,^a
- 7 But whoever seeks to go beyond that, such are transgressors —

1a. The last two chapters opened with a warning of the approach of judgment. This, as a fitting sequel, opens with a declaration of the triumph of the believers, for it was possible that the wicked should have tasted punishment without resultant good to the faithful. To dispel all such doubts it is stated that the believers shall be successful even in this life.

4a. *Fâ 'ilûn* (from *fi 'l*, *doing*) means *doers of deeds*, and *li-l-zakât* means *for the sake of purity* or *to attain purity*. The word *zakât* means originally *purity*, as in 19:13, while *zakât* in the sense of poor-rate is spoken of as being *paid*, *yu 'tûn al-zakât* — they pay *zakât*, being always the form adopted. Hence the significance adopted here — they do what they do for the sake of, or to attain to, purity.

5a. *Furûj*, plural of *farj*, indicates *the part of a person which it is indecent to expose* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), particularly the pudenda. In this sense *hifẓ al-farj* means generally *the observing of continence*, or *the restraining of sexual passions*.

6a. The words *au mâ malakat aimânu-hum*, of which a literal rendering is given in the translation, usually indicates *slaves*. It should be noted that this chapter is a Makkan revelation, and the conditions under which slave-girls could be taken as wives were given later at Madînah; see 4:25a. If the reference here is to sexual relations, the permission regarding those *whom their right hands possess* must be read subject to the conditions of 4:25. It may be added that slave-girls, when taken as wives, did not acquire the full status of a free wife, and hence they are spoken of distinctly. It may, however, be added that *hifẓ al-farj* in a wider sense means *the covering of parts of the body which it is indecent to expose*, and in this connection it must be borne in mind that according to Islamic rules of decency, the exposure of such parts of the body, as are generally exposed in ballrooms and theatres, is disallowed, but a certain degree of freedom is allowed to women in the presence of their husbands and female servants and to men in the presence of their wives and male servants.

8 And those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant,

9 And those who keep a guard on their prayers.

10 These are the heirs,

11 Who inherit Paradise. Therein they will abide.

12 And certainly We create human beings of an extract of clay,^a

13 Then We make him a small life-germ in a firm resting-place,

14 Then We make the life-germ a clot, then We make the clot a lump of flesh, then We make (in) the lump of flesh bones, then We clothe the bones with flesh, then We cause it to grow into another creation. So blessed be Allâh, the Best of creators!^a

15 Then after that you certainly die.

16 Then on the day of Resurrection you will surely be raised up.

17 And indeed We have made above you seven ways — and never are We heedless of creation.^a

12a. The creation of human beings is here traced back to earth, for the life-germ in sperma is an extract of food, which is drawn from earth in whatever form it may be. It should be noted that while the first ten verses speak of the devotional growth of human being, their physical growth is here spoken of, and thus a comparison may be established between the physical and the devotional growth. Though described in the past tense, it is a general law of the creation of human beings that is spoken of here. The addition of the words, *then We cause it to grow into another creation* (verse 14), is to show that human being's creation does not end with the completion of the different stages of physical growth, as in the case of other animals, but he is endowed with certain other faculties — the reference being to the moral and religious side of human being's growth.

14a. The several stages in the growth of the human child, as given here, and unknown then, are quite in accordance with scientific investigation. It should be borne in mind that the word *fa*, meaning *then*, as used in *then We clothe the bones ...* does not always imply order. This is clear from the context, which states that there is first a lump of flesh, and the nucleus of the bones is generated in this flesh.

17a. Instead of the *seven samâwât*, here we have the *seven ways*, which are no doubt the orbits of the seven members of the solar system, excluding the earth, as shown by the words *above you*.

18 And We send down water from the cloud according to a measure, then We cause it to settle in the earth, and We are indeed able to carry it away.

19 Then We cause to grow thereby gardens of palm-trees and grapes for you. You have therein many fruits and of them you eat;

20 And a tree that grows out of Mount Sinai, which produces oil and relish for the eaters.^a

21 And surely there is a lesson for you in the cattle. We make you to drink of what is in their bellies, and you have in them many advantages and of them you eat,

22 And on them and on the ships you are borne.

SECTION 2: **Nûh**

23 And certainly We sent Nûh to his people, so he said: O my people, serve Allâh, you have no Deity other than Him. Will you not guard against evil?

24 But the chiefs of those who disbelieved from among his people said: He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves, who desires to have superiority over you. And if Allâh had pleased, He could have sent down malâ'ikah. We have not heard of this among our fathers of yore.

20a. In the tree that grows out of Mount Sinai, and which produces oil, there seems to be reference to the *blessed olive tree* of 24:35, as representing the Muslim nation; see 24:35a.

25 He is only a madman, so bear with him for a time.

26 He said: My *Rabb*, help me against their calling me a liar.

27 So We revealed to him: Make the ark under Our eyes and according to Our revelation; then when Our command comes, and water gushes forth from the valley, take into it of every kind a pair, two,^a and your people, except those among them against whom the word has gone forth, and speak not to Me in respect of those who are unjust; surely they will be drowned.

28 Then when you are firmly seated, you and those with you, in the ark, say: Praise be to Allâh, Who delivered us from the unjust people!

29 And say: My *Rabb*, cause me to land a blessed landing and You are the Best of those who bring to land.

30 Surely there are signs in this, and surely We are ever trying (men).

31 Then We raised after them another generation.

32 So We sent among them a messenger from among them, saying: Serve Allâh — you have no Deity other than Him. Will you not guard against evil?

SECTION 3: **Prophets after Nûh**

33 And the chiefs of his people who disbelieved and called the meeting of the Hereafter a lie, and whom We had given plenty to enjoy in this world's life, said: This is only a mortal like you, eating of that whereof you eat and drinking of what you drink.^a

27a. See 11:40a, 40b, 42a.

34 And if you obey a mortal like yourselves, then surely you are losers.

35 Does he promise you that, when you are dead and become dust and bones, you will then be brought forth?

36 Far, very far, is that which you are promised:

37 There is naught but our life in this world: we die and we live and we shall not be raised again:

38 He is naught but a man who has forged a lie against Allâh, and we are not going to believe in him.

39 He said: My *Rabb*, help me against their calling me a liar.

40 He said: In a little while they will certainly be repenting.

41 So the punishment overtook them in justice, and We made them as rubbish; so away with the unjust people!^a

42 Then We raised after them other generations.

43 No people can hasten on their doom, nor can they postpone (it).

33a. The prophets are rejected because they are subject to the same laws of nature in their human requirements as other men. And no one can be a model for human beings, who are not himself a human being, and who is not subject to the same laws of nature as other human beings, for only a human being can show human being show they can avoid falling a prey to the frailties of human nature. Hence, a Divine incarnation, or Deity in a human body, cannot serve as a model to human beings. We want a mortal to show us how to avoid the pitfalls with which we, as mortals, are surrounded; if Allâh Himself comes into the world, He cannot serve this purpose.

41a. It is the occurrence of the word *saiḥah* in this verse which has led many to think that verses 33 – 41 of this section refer to Hûd or *Ṣâliḥ*. But it should be borne in mind

that *saiḥah* means punishment (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), and is equally applicable to punishment by earthquake or by any other means. In the chronological order of prophets given in the 7th chapter it is Hûd who follows Nûḥ, and his people ‘Âd were destroyed by a sandstorm.

44 Then We sent Our messengers one after another. Whenever its messenger came to a people, they called him a liar, so We made them follow one another and We made them stories. So away with a people who believe not!^a

45 Then We sent Mûsâ and his brother Hârûn with Our messages and a clear authority.

46 To Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they behaved haughtily and they were an insolent people.

47 So they said: Shall we believe in two mortals like ourselves while their people serve us?

48 So they rejected them and became of those who were destroyed.

49 And certainly We gave Mûsâ the Book that they might go aright.

50 And We made the son of Maryam and his mother a sign, and We gave them refuge on a lofty ground having meadows and springs.^a

44a. The significance of making them stories is that the stories of their evil fate were the only remembrance of them left when they perished.

50a. There has been much discussion as to the land spoken of in this verse. *Rabwah* is *lofty ground*, and *qarâr* means *cultivated land*, and *a place where water rests in a meadow* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Jerusalem, Egypt, Palestine or Damascus, which are the names suggested, do not answer the description, which applies exactly to the valley of Kashmir. Part of the lost ten tribes of Isrâ’îl is also traced to Kashmir, where a large number of towns and villages bear the names of the towns and villages of Palestine. The presence of a tomb known as the tomb of Nabî (i.e., the prophet), or ‘Îsâ, or Yûz Âsaf, in the *Khân Yâr* street in the capital of Kashmir, lends additional support to this theory. The fact that the chapter deals with the final triumph of prophets and their followers and their deliverance from the hands of their enemies also gives us a clue to the mystery attending the circumstances of the disappearance of Nabî ‘Îsâ after the event of the Cross; for, as shown in 4:157a, ‘Îsâ did not die on the cross. According to a saying of the Holy Prophet, ‘Îsâ lived 120

years (*Tafsîr* (Commentary), by Ismâ'îl ibn 'Umar (*Ibn Kathîr*), vol. ii, p. 246). This verse tells us that, being delivered from the hands of his enemies, he was given shelter at some other place, and the description of that place as indicated in this verse, along with the fact that Kashmir has a tomb, which every available evidence shows to be the tomb of 'Îsâ himself, leads us to the conclusion that Kashmir is the land referred to in this verse.

As regards the tomb, the following evidence shows that the sacred body of no less a personage than 'Îsâ rests there: (a) oral testimony, based on tradition, of the people of Kashmir tells us that the tomb belongs to one who bore the name of Yûz Âsaf, who was known as a *nabî* (i.e., a prophet), and who came to Kashmir from the West about 2,000 years ago; (b) the *Târîkh A'zamî*, an historical work written some two hundred years ago, says, referring to this tomb, on page 82: "The tomb is generally known as that of a prophet. He was a prince, who came to Kashmir from a foreign land.... His name was Yûz Âsaf"; (c) the *Ikmâl al-Dîn*, an Arabic work, which is a thousand years old, also mentions Yûz Âsaf as having travelled in *some lands*; (d) Joseph Jacobs states, on the authority of a very old version of the story of Yûz Âsaf, that he (Joasaph) at last reached Kashmir, and there died (*Barlaam and Josaphat*, page cv).

This evidence shows that the tomb in Khân Yâr (Srinagar) is the tomb of Yûz Âsaf. But who is this *Yûz Âsaf*? That he is called a nabs (*prophet*) both in oral tradition and in history settles the time in which he lived, for no prophet is recognized by the Muslims to have appeared after their Holy Prophet. Again, there is a striking resemblance between the names Yûz and Yasû', the latter being the Hebrew form of Jesus. There is also a remarkable similarity in the teachings of Yûz Âsaf and 'Îsâ ; for instance, the parable of the seed-sower occurring in Matthew 13:3, Mark 4:3 and Luke 8:5 occurs also in "Barlaam and Josaphat" (page cxi). Another very striking circumstance is that Yûz Âsaf gave the name *Bushrâ* (Arabic for *Gospel*) to his teachings, as the following passage from the *Ikmâl al-Dîn* shows: "Then he began to compare the tree to the *Bushrâ*, which he preached to the people". All these circumstances lead us to the conclusion that Nabî 'Îsâ went to Kashmir after the event of the crucifixion, and that he preached, lived, died and was buried there.

SECTION 4: **Higher Values of Life**

51 O ye messengers, eat of the good things and do good. Surely I am Knower of what you do.

52 And surely this, your community is one community, and I am your *Rabb*, so keep your duty to Me.

53 But they became divided into sects, each party rejoicing in that which was with them.

54 So leave them in their ignorance till a time.

55 Think, they that by the wealth and children wherewith We aid them,

56 We are hastening to them of good things? Nay, they perceive not.

57 Surely they who live in awe for fear of their *Rabb*,

58 And those who believe in the messages of their *Rabb*,

59 And those who associate naught with their *Rabb*,

60 And those who give what they give while their hearts are full of fear that to their *Rabb* they must return —

61 These hasten to good things and they are foremost in attaining them.

62 And We lay not on any *nafs* a burden except to the extent of its ability, and with Us is a book which speaks the truth, and they are not wronged.

63 Nay, their hearts are in ignorance about it, and they have besides this other deeds which they do.

64 Until, when We seize those who lead easy lives among them with chastisement, lo! They cry for succour.

65 Cry not for succour this day. Surely you will not be helped by Us.

66 My messages were indeed recited to you, but you used to turn back on your heels.

67 Haughtily, passing nights in talking nonsense about it.

68 Do they not then ponder the Word? Or has there come to them that which did not come to their fathers of old?

69 Or do they not recognize their Messenger, that they deny him?

70 Or say they: There is madness in him? Nay, he has brought them the Truth, and most of them hate the Truth.

71 And if the Truth follow their desires, the *samâwât* and the earth and all those who are therein would perish. Nay, We have brought them their reminder, but they turn away from their reminder.

72 Or do you ask them recompense? But the recompense of your *Rabb* is best, and He is the Best of providers.

73 And surely you call them to a right way.

74 And surely those who believe not in the Hereafter are deviating from the way.

75 And if We show mercy to them and remove the distress they have, they would persist in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on.

76 And already We seized them with chastisement, but they were not submissive to their *Rabb*, nor did they humble themselves.^a

77 Until, when We open for them a door of severe chastisement, lo! They are in despair at it.^a

76a. The punishment referred to in this verse, and the distress, the removal of which is mentioned in the previous verse, probably refer to the famine which overtook the Makkans.

77a. They do not take a warning from the milder punishment, so a severer punishment must follow. This overtook them in the form of battles, leading to their ultimate vanquishment. But the promise relates to the future as well.

SECTION 5: Polytheism is self-condemned

78 And He it is Who made for you the ears and the eyes and the hearts. Little it is that you give thanks!

79 And He it is Who multiplied you in the earth, and to Him you will be gathered.

80 And He it is Who gives life and causes death, and His is the alternation of the night and the day. Do you not then understand?

81 Nay, they say the like of what the ancients said.

82 They say: When we die and become dust and bones, shall we then be raised up?

83 We are indeed promised this, and (so were) our fathers before. This is naught but stories of those of old!

84 Say: Whose is the earth, and whoever is therein, if you know?

85 They will say: Allâh's. Say: Will you not then mind?

86 Say: Who is the *Rabb* of the seven *samâwât* and the *Rabb* of the mighty Throne of power?

87 They will say: (This is) Allâh's. Say: Will you not then guard against evil?

88 Say: Who is it in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things and He protects, and none is protected against Him, if you know?

89 They will say: (This is) Allâh's. Say: Whence are you then deceived?

90 Nay, We have brought them the Truth and surely they are liars.

91 Allâh has not taken to Himself a son, nor is there with Him any (other) deity — in that case would each deity have taken away what he created, and some of them would have overpowered others. Glory be to Allâh above what they describe —

92 The Knower of the unseen and the seen; so may He be exalted above what they associate (with Him)!

SECTION 6: Regrets of the Wicked

93 Say: My *Rabb*, if You show me that which they are promised —

94 My *Rabb*, then place me not with the unjust people.

95 And surely We are well Able to show you what We promise them.^a

96 Repel evil with that which is best.^a We know best what they describe.

97 And say: My *Rabb*, I seek refuge in You from the evil suggestions of the *shayâtîn*,^a

98 And I seek refuge in You, my *Rabb*, lest they come to me.

99 Until when death overtakes one of them,^a he says: My *Rabb*, send me back,^b

95a. The promise given to the Holy Prophet in these verses is that the power of his persecutors will be broken in his lifetime.

96a. The doing of good in return for evil is the common teaching of all prophets. But nowhere is the principle put in such a beautiful and practical form as in the Qur'ân. To return good for evil is only possible under certain circumstances, and the Gospel doctrine — that ye resist not evil — has not been found practicable. The Qur'ân, however, says, *repel evil with that which is best*. In repelling evil the rule to be observed is that it must be repelled by what is best. If you can repel an evil by doing good for it, it is the course recommended; but if punishment is necessary, that would be the better course. It is the only workable principle of life.

97a. The evil suggestion of the *shayâtîn* were really suggestions of the wicked, who were opposed to the progress of Islâm, and the Prophet is here told to look upon Allâh as his only support. *To seek refuge in the Rabb* is the height of goodness. Nowhere has a human being a better refuge than in the Source of all strength, and no mortal can aspire to a higher honour than having his refuge in the *Rabb*. The command to the

Prophet to say this is really an image of the aspiration of his *nafs*, the inmost desire which furnished the guiding rule of his life. His *nafs* rested in that highest degree of security from all evil suggestions, which is termed *refuge in the Rabb*.

100 That I may do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is but a word that he speaks. And before them is a barrier, until the day they are raised.^a

101 So when the trumpet is blown, there will be no ties of relationship among them that day, nor will they ask of one another.

102 Then those whose good deeds are heavy, those are the successful.^a

103 And those whose good deeds are light, those are they who have lost their *nafs*, abiding in hell.

104 The Fire will scorch their faces, and they therein will be in severe affliction.

105 Were not My messages recited to you, but you used to reject them?

106 They will say: Our *Rabb*, our adversity overcame us, and we were an erring people.

107 Our *Rabb*, take us out of it; then if we return (to evil), we shall be unjust.

108 He will say: Begone therein, and speak not to Me.

99a. These words make it quite certain that the devils of the two previous verses are no other than the wicked opponents of the Holy Prophet.

99b. The original has *irji'ûni*, in which *irji'û* ("send") is in the plural, whereas it should have been *irji'* in the singular in accosting the Divine Being. In Arabic the plural is sometimes used to denote a repetition of the singular verb, and thus *irji'ûni* is here regarded as equivalent to a repetition of *irji'nî* (*Anwâr al-Tanzîl wa Asrâr al-Ta'wîl* (Commentary), by Qâzî Abû Sa'îd 'Abd Allâh ibn 'Umar al-Baidâwî). Or, the plural is used out of respect for the Divine Being.

100a. That the dead do not return to life is a principle which is reaffirmed here; see also 21:95a. According to the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân there are three states of a human being's life, viz., his life in this world, his life in *barzakh*, and the great manifestation of all realities that will take place on the day of Resurrection. *Barzakh* is the intermediate state in which the *nafs* lives after death till the Resurrection. Here it is stated that no one who has passed into the state of *barzakh* is allowed to go back into the previous state. See further 39:42a.

102a. *Mawâzîn* is the plural of *mîzân*, a balance, and of *mauzûn*, meaning, *a thing that is weighed*. In both cases the significance is the same, the *balance* meaning the *balance of good deeds*.

109 Surely there was a party of My servants who said: Our *Rabb*, we believe, so forgive us and have mercy on us, and You are the Best of those who show mercy.

110 But you ridiculed them, until they made you forget remembrance of Me, and you used to laugh at them.^a

111 Surely I have rewarded them this day because they were patient, that they are the achievers.

112 He will say: How many years did you tarry in the earth?

113 They will say: We tarried a day or part of a day, but ask those who keep account.

114 He will say: You tarried but a little — if you only knew!

115 Do you then think that We have created you in vain, and that you will not be returned to Us?^a

116 So exalted be Allâh, the True King! No Deity is there but He, the *Rabb* of the Throne of Grace.

117 And whoever invokes, besides Allâh, another deity — he has no proof of this — his reckoning is only with his *Rabb*. Surely the disbelievers will not be successful.

118 And say: My *Rabb*, forgive and have mercy, and You are the Best of those who show mercy.

110a. Really it was not the believers who caused them to forget the remembrance of their *Rabb* but, on account of their mocking the believers, the disbelievers forgot their *Rabb*; hence the believers are here spoken of as though they caused the disbelievers to forget their *Rabb*.

115a. This verse establishes the doctrine of the responsibility of human actions. Human beings are not created *in vain*, but they will be returned to his or her *Rabb* to meet the consequences of what he or she does in this life.